

Comprehensive Exam Questions - 2007

Note: In Spring 2007, two sets of questions were administered. Both sets have been included below.

Spring 2007

Set A

1. Some reference librarians have observed that there is a substantial decline in the number of “right-answer” factual questions brought by patrons because they are easily answered on the Web. At the same time, librarians report an increased number of genuinely challenging “stumper” type questions. If this trend continues, what impact might it have on (1) how librarians are educated and (2) how information agencies are organized?
2. Many years ago, Lawrence Clark Powell stated that librarianship involved love of books, love of people, and a need to bring the two together. Does this seem true today? Why? What elements of that statement, if any, would you change to reflect the realities of professional practice in the early 21st century? In your response, please address all three elements of Powell’s original statement.
3. In a traditional print world, libraries purchased books and other materials. Once purchased, the materials were owned by the library until a decision was made to sell or discard them. In an electronic world, many books, journals and other materials are leased rather than purchased. Librarians are thus faced with a variety of management issues, including dealing with licensing issues, developing infrastructure, and providing different kinds of customer services.

Discuss the major issues surrounding the “ownership” versus “access” debate. What are the advantages and disadvantages of both the purchase/ownership and lease/access models? Discuss the short-term and long-term implications for an information agency of your choice.

4. Michael Buckland has asserted that providing access to information is the central and defining principle of library and information science. Demonstrate that you understand this central feature of the field by identifying three major components, or facets, of the concept "access to information" and describe their significance to the provision of access to information.
5. Digital libraries and collections are receiving increasing attention in the literature and at professional meetings. Some argue that traditional hard copy collections will soon

be a thing of the past. However, in the current environment, access systems simultaneously hold metadata for hard-copy and digital items, thus creating challenges for the organization and representation of information.

First, summarize, compare and contrast the roles of descriptive, administrative, and structural metadata. Then, considering a collection that combines both physical objects (e.g., books, DVDs, slides) and purely digital assets (e.g., datasets, blog content, digitized journal articles and books, video files), provide the rationale for differences in the design of one descriptive metadata element, one administrative metadata element, and one structural metadata element for each type of item (i.e., physical object and digital asset) in the collection.

Spring 2007 Set B

1. Ranganathan's Third Law states “every book its reader.” What does this mean? Choose one kind of information agency and describe how this law might (1) affect the values that guide the information agency and (2) be applied to the design of policy, services, and organizational structure in that information agency?
2. All professionals hold a “world view” of their work and the standards associated with their practice, which is shaped by a variety of experiences. When you entered the Information Sciences program at UT, you were likely not aware of the important theories and theorists that guide contemporary research and practice in our field. Which particular theories and theorists shape your work with users and the use of information? Which specific theories guide your understanding of the structure and organization of intellectual content, regardless of format, including creation, exchange, and storage of content?
3. In a traditional print world, libraries purchased books and other materials. Once purchased, the materials were owned by the library until a decision was made to sell or discard them. In an electronic world, many books, journals and other materials are leased rather than purchased. Librarians are thus faced with a variety of management issues, including dealing with licensing issues, developing infrastructure, and providing different kinds of customer services.

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4. The development of the Internet and the rapid development of new applications from search engines (e.g., Lycos, Altavista, Google) and directories (e.g., Yahoo!) to e-

commerce sites (e.g., Amazon, eBay) to digital libraries (e.g., American Memory, JStor) to collaborative, social information spaces (e.g., Web 2.0 / Library 2.0, MySpace, Wikipedia, Flickr) makes it possible to envision a world without information professionals and libraries. These developments have led to speculation that information professionals will no longer be needed to mediate access to information. Others argue that the information landscape is becoming more complex, making it increasingly difficult to find high quality information without consulting an information professional.

Taking a specific information environment as your starting point (e.g., academic library, school media center, public library, special library, etc.), and making explicit use of what you know about the roles played and the value added by information intermediaries, discuss how information professionals remain relevant in an environment where users can obtain the information they need from their desks or their homes.

5. You have been asked to develop a multi-lingual, accessible Web-based information system for your information agency. You will be making the decisions about technology selection, information architecture, usability / accessibility, metadata design, and content management. Select an information environment of your choice and discuss the following questions:
 - 1) How will you determine the technical and cognitive capabilities of your audience(s)?
 - 2) Which LIS theories and principles will guide your decision-making process?

Summer 2007

1. We live in a country that consists of many people of different backgrounds, cultures, values, and preferences. From the core values statement of the American Library Association, we read:

“ALA recognizes its broad social responsibilities. The broad social responsibilities of the American Library Association are defined in terms of the contribution that librarianship can make in ameliorating or solving the critical problems of society; support for efforts to help inform and educate the people of the United States on these problems and to encourage them to examine the many views on and the facts regarding each problem; and the willingness of ALA to take a position on current critical issues with the relationship to libraries and library service set forth in the position statement.”

In addition, we read, “We value our nation's diversity and strive to reflect that diversity by providing a full spectrum of resources and services to the communities we serve.”

From the ALA code of ethics we read, “We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.

Why is valuing diversity important to the information professional?

How can an information professional promote behaviors that comply with the above values and ethics?

2. A variety of commentators have noted that Google’s search engine interface is far superior to what is found in a typical on-line catalog or database and often yields better results. Using one or two examples of your choice, discuss the assets and liabilities of the “Google way” contrasted with the way that librarians have both traditionally provided and currently guide intellectual access to content.
3. Many disciplines of the information professions have codes of ethics, but there is as of yet no one overarching ethical code that includes a variety of information professionals. Discuss the major principles that might be included in such a code.
4. The OCLC surveys continue to report that many Americans, as well as others, automatically associate "library" with "books and book reading.” These findings support the notion of the library as the "book place." Discuss the assets and the

liabilities of the popular notion that libraries are a place to go for books and book reading.

5. As a professional, with a degree from an ALA accredited institution, you have acquired and assimilated many different perspectives of seeing and understanding professional practice.

Selecting an area of information work, discuss the views or perspectives that will inform your work, support your decision-making and guide your professional judgment.

Fall 2007

1. Developments in the 21st century require information professionals to respond to various changes and challenges. Selecting an information environment,
 - Identify at least one technical or socio-cultural change for information professionals in their domains of work
 - Discuss some of the significant challenges faced by information professionals owing to the above identified change(s)?
 - Describe the new skills and competencies required to effectively meet the challenges

2. Facilitating intellectual and physical access to resources is important to information professionals. Nevertheless, sometimes information organizations establish physical, cultural or technical rules, procedures or standards that may become barriers that prevent or constrain information access by the communities they serve. Selecting a specific context or environment,
 - Discuss three concrete examples of these barriers
 - Explain why they are barriers in your selected environment
 - Propose solutions to at least one of the identified barriers

3. Relevance has been a topic of research interest in information science for more than three decades. What is relevance? Why is relevance a central concept in information science? What are the conflicting views of relevance and their implications for information retrieval?

4. Researchers and scholars of information seeking and use (for example, Carol Kuhlthau) have described the importance of “affect” (feelings, emotions or moods) with respect to the user’s experience in the process of information seeking. The classic triad of thoughts, actions, and feelings central to any constructive process is rarely taken into consideration in information-seeking processes. A holistic view of information seeking encompasses the affective experiences of users. Selecting a specific context,
 - Describe the impact of affect (users’ feelings) in the information-seeking process
 - Discuss how information professionals can reduce the impact of negative emotions in information seeking

5. There are many environments in which information is organized to facilitate access. To effectively organize information, we need principles, methods, and tools. Selecting an information environment,
- Discuss why representation of information is important in this environment
 - Describe how information is represented in this environment
 - Give concrete examples of such representations and their specific purposes